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Congress Is Urged to Resume Anti-Sandinista Aid

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 29 — A high-ranking Administration spokesman on Latin America engaged in a sharp debate today with Congressional critics over covert United States aid to rebels fighting the Government of Nicaragua.

Langhorne A. Motley, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, told a House hearing that it would be a "serious mistake" for Congress to continue its ban on aid to the rebels, known as "contras."

Without the pressure of armed rebellion, Mr. Motley argued, the Sandinistas would "have no reason to compromise" in any negotiations over Nicaragua's foreign or domestic policies.

But Representative Michael D. Barnes, the Maryland Democrat who heads the subcommittee that conducted today's hearing, told Mr. Motley that "things are worse, not better" in Nicaragua since the United States started supplying aid to the rebels. "I fail to see any American interests that are advanced by this policy," he said.

Representative Gerry E. Studds, Democrat of Massachusetts, told Mr. Motley that "whether you like it or not," the aid request is "politically dead" in the current Congress.

The lawmakers appropriated \$14 million in aid to the rebels last year but said it could not be spent unless Congress voted to release the funds during the current session. A fight over those funds is likely to occur in the coming weeks, and most Congressmen expect the Administration request to be defeated.

When asked whether the Administration was considering alternative proposals for funneling some sort of help to the rebels, Mr. Motley insisted that the Administration had not abandoned its attempt to convince the Congress to approve its original request.

"I'm not prepared to accept that we can't work these things out," Mr. Mot-

ley told the hearing, which was conducted by the Western Hemisphere subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

But in a brief interview after his testimony, Mr. Motley said he did not want to "beat my head against a wall" by pushing the aid request in the face of adamant Congressional opposition. He indicated some interest in exploring alternative proposals.

"You have to look at the different tools, pressures and mechanisms you have available," he said. "Everybody's trying to find some solution that is not that difficult to swallow."

Mr. Barnes added in an interview that Administration officials were quietly sounding out Congress about alternatives.

One suggestion raised on Capitol Hill recently would be for Congress to fi-

nance some form of humanitarian aid to the families of the guerrillas battling the Sandinista regime. Representative Jim Wright of Texas, the majority leader, told a news conference on Monday that open aid of that sort would have a better chance of passing Congress than a secret operation.

But other lawmakers agree with Representative Sam Gejdenson, Democrat of Connecticut, who said after the hearing today that "welfare for the contras is not a program Congress will buy."

Mr. Motley was questioned sharply by the subcommittee on published reports that the United States was still channeling aid to the contras through friendly countries in the region, such as Honduras. Representative Peter H. Kostmayer, a Pennsylvania Democrat, warned Mr. Motley that the use of back channels to avoid Congressional intent was a violation of law.

Was this being done, the lawmaker asked the Administration official. "The answer is no," Mr. Motley said.

But Mr. Barnes said later in an interview that he did not accept Mr. Motley's answer. "They're getting it from somewhere," he said of the rebels. "They're not raising money from bake sales."

When Mr. Motley was asked whether the Administration had any plans to increase its military presence in Central America, he replied, "I see nothing at this time — today — to raise that issue."